

### **PSALM 4:1, 4-8**

Answer me when I call, O God of my right! You gave me room when I was in distress. Be gracious to me and hear my prayer. How long, you people, shall my honor suffer shame? How long will you love vain words and seek after lies? But know that the Lord has set apart the faithful for himself; the Lord hears when I call to him.

When you are disturbed, do not sin, ponder it on your beds and be silent. Offer right sacrifices, and put your trust in the Lord. There are many who say, "O that we might see some good! Let the light of your face shine on us, O Lord!" You have put gladness in my heart more than when their grain and wine abound. I will both lie down and sleep in peace; for you alone, O Lord, make me lie down in safety.

### **LUKE 12:22-34**

Jesus said to his disciples, Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? If then you are not able to do so small a thing as that, why do you worry about the rest?

Consider the lilies how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith! And do not keep striving for what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying. For it is the nations of the world that strive after all these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, strive for his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.

Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

Sell your possessions and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

**RELAX!**

**Psalm 4**  
**Luke 12:22-34**

What in heaven's name will be next? Isn't that what we keep asking ourselves? Because there is a volcanic cloud of grief, anger and anxiety hanging over our entire world as the worst of humanity makes new headlines daily. In our own country, we have had over 200 mass shootings so far this year which is just half over. There's another one and another one and another one as we watch the sorrowful images of inconsolable family members hugging each other and listen to the grisly details of the latest assault on humanity.

And while we would like to forget the war in Ukraine, we cannot because we are updated on the conflict every day. There is no getting away from the indescribable carnage; images of bombed out buildings, mass graves and the skeletons of burned-out tanks. And then the bigger picture of refugees numbering in the millions flooding Europe and elsewhere and the burgeoning food crisis threatening Africa and other developing countries looming in the background which only serves to increase our angst.

And here at home we stare at gas prices as we pass service stations. We see rents rising and food prices skyrocketing. We see a nationwide shortage of infant formulas threatening the health and future well-being of the very vulnerable. And two and a half years later, deaths and illness still result from our old nemesis, Covid and its very unfriendly variants.

It is likely true that there have always been this many unsettling events occurring in every era of history. But in the past, we didn't know about it all. Now because the entire world is electronically connected, we know everything and we know it immediately. It affects us.

How could it not? My initial response to the news of the day is a feeling of helplessness. And when we feel helpless, anger and fear are certain to follow. I ask myself what I can do about any of this. Realistically, little if nothing. I can rant and rave from the pulpit, but I am preaching to the choir because I know you all feel the same way. But we can talk about it and we should talk about it since it presents us with a spiritual dilemma. So let us look to the scriptures to see how they might assist in coping with this challenge.

Let's begin with our psalm which identifies with our problem. Don't we say to ourselves: *O that we might see some good!?* The author was clearly in personal distress and calling out to God to help him through it. You can hear the anger and fear in his voice: *How long will you love vain words and seek after lies?* Might there be a parallel here with our own frustrations? All of which is to say that the scriptures understand the emotional trauma we are experiencing. We are not alone in this.

Jesus picks up the thread when speaking to the worries of his disciples and other devotees who were largely working-class people, few of whom came from wealth. So, they knew what it was to struggle and basically live from paycheck to paycheck as it were. And remember too that they were all under the umbrella of the corrupt and repressive rule of Rome. Their lives were fraught with anxieties—just as ours are.

What we also share in common is the helplessness we feel in our inability to change the systemic way that it is. We are at the mercy of politicians who are more interested in raising money than they are in working together to solve the underlying problems plaguing us. Even with the modest new gun law, while an eighteen-year-old cannot buy a beer or cigarettes, he can purchase as many assault rifles as his heart desires. And there are so many other things we can only stare at in utter disbelief.

We apparently have a difficult time overcoming our fear. In 2013 the CDC began research to study how the 400 million guns in our country were affecting health. When the results began to filter in—revealing that the homicide and suicide rates among gun owners were

far and away higher than that of non-owners, the NRA and the gun industry pressed Congress to cut off funding for the study because the findings were undermining their chief selling point for gun ownership; namely that guns make you safer. Concerned about their donations and the potential ire of their constituents, Congress capitulated to their demand.

The point is that we struggle with strategies to relieve our fears and sometimes pursue solutions—alcohol, drug use, road rage, angry outbursts, physical assaults—which only serve to make everything worse. All you have to do is watch your evening news to hear all about the latest incidences.

Jesus paints a bigger picture. He is telling his followers to Relax. We all worry about things—we're all afraid of something. Some of us wonder how we will pay the rent next month or fill up our tanks. Some of us may be wondering when and where we can buy infant formula again. Some of us are anxious that another recession is looming and how that will affect our portfolios or future retirements. And we're all worried about our children and grandchildren and wondering what kind of a world they are growing up in.

Let us be clear that Jesus is acknowledging that our concerns are all legitimate. But what he is also saying is that none of our anxiety over this will change anything. *And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? If then you are not able to do so small a thing as that, why do you worry about the rest?* In fact, worry will probably shorten our lifespans. So, Relax!

But understand this too. Does it mean you are callous and don't care about school shootings or the war in Ukraine if you don't worry about them? Not at all. Concern and worry are two different things. I do not need to internalize the horrendous grief the parents of the Uvalde slaughter are feeling to have compassion for them. The nausea and anger I feel cannot benefit them.

The psalmist says, *Let the light of your face shine on us, O Lord! I will both lie down and sleep in peace; for you alone, O Lord, make me lie down in safety.* And Jesus concludes

his message by saying: *Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.*

So here's the bottom line. You and I are not going to save the world. But do what you can do. Turn off the news if you have to. You can stay informed without getting all worked up. There are an infinite number of ways you can do that. Some of it is political and some of it just being an active humanitarian. But do stay in your lane. Don't go trying to save anyone—because you can't. And trust that God is there. It has been said that you can either pray or worry—but don't do both. So, Serve the good and then *lie down and sleep in peace.* Just Relax!

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